



XERISCAPE

**THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF
LANDSCAPE WATER CONSERVATION**





Water Conservation: a phrase more residents of the Coachella Valley are becoming accustomed to hearing. Booming population and development have increased the demand on the desert's supply of water. In the residential areas of the valley, approximately 25% of the water supply is used for landscape and garden watering, much of which is applied inefficiently.

In an attempt to reduce the excessive water use, the City of Cathedral City is educating its residents on Xeriscape landscaping: quality landscaping that conserves water and protects the environment. Traditional landscapes may incorporate one or two principles of water conservation, but they do not utilize the entire concept to reduce landscape water use effectively. Xeriscape landscaping techniques will save you money, reduce the amount of water used to irrigate your plants and create a beautiful, easy-to-care-for yard for all to enjoy.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF XERISCAPE

Xeriscape, now a familiar term with gardeners and landscapers, originates from the Greek word for dry, xeros. Many people confuse ZERO-scape with Xeriscape. ZERO-scape is what most people have in mind when you describe an area that has low water use. This can mean an area that is covered with gravel, one tree and possibly a boulder. Xeriscape, on the other hand, refers to seven horticultural principles which help to ensure that landscapes, wherever they are located, reflect a sensitivity to the local environment and its climate. By using the Xeriscape principles, you can identify landscape options, express your creativity and, at the same time, be mindful and respectful of our unique desert environment.

1 ~ PLANNING AND DESIGN

TIP: Take the time to develop a complete plan for your yard and stay focused... this will save you time and money!

Creating a water-efficient landscape begins with a well-thought-out landscape design. Sketch your yard with locations of existing structures, trees, shrubs and grass areas. Then consider the landscape budget, function, maintenance and water requirements. Implementing your landscape design can be done gradually over several years. Make sure to address the following questions when designing your new landscape:

- What type of soil does the site have?
- Which areas are going to have more or less sun than other areas?
- How much maintenance are you willing to put into the finished product?
- How can you design the landscape to be both water efficient and energy efficient?
- Are there certain views that you may not want to obscure or is there something you would like to screen from view?
- Do you want to complete the entire landscape at once or in stages?





2 ~ APPROPRIATE PLANT SELECTION

TIP: Local landscape architects, designers, nurserymen and water agencies can help assist with plant selection.

Xeriscape landscapes need not be cactus and rock gardens. They can be green, cool landscapes full of beautiful plants maintained with water-efficient practices. Select trees, shrubs and groundcovers based on their adaptability to our desert climate. The Coachella Valley is blessed with an abundance of beautiful native plants that come in all shapes and sizes and serve a variety of purposes from shade to seasonal color to screening unsightly areas. Many low-water use plants have beautiful flowers or interesting forms; these plants will help you to create a colorful, low-maintenance yard without exhausting our precious water resources.

3 ~ EFFICIENT IRRIGATION

TIP: Adjust your irrigation schedule once every quarter!

The goal of any irrigation system is to give plants a sufficient amount of water without waste. Sprinkler and drip irrigation can be incorporated to achieve water conservation in the landscape. Almost all new plants should be watered regularly to get them established and most plants need some kind of irrigation even after they become mature. The trick is to find out how much water your plants require and to apply only that much. When you design your irrigation system, try to put trees, shrubs, groundcovers and turf areas each on different valves so you can time their irrigation separately. Most plants will need more frequent irrigations during their first year. After the plants have become established cut back on the watering. Remember that during the cooler months, plants do not need as much water.

4 ~ PRACTICAL TURF AREAS

TIP: When installing turf in your front landscape, keep the turf away from your driveway and sidewalk. This will help limit the amount of overspray that ends up in your street.

Yes, turf grass is considered part of a Xeriscape landscape plan. When considering landscape's water requirement, it is important to note that turf grasses require more frequent watering and maintenance than most other landscape plants. When designing or evaluating turf areas in the landscape, consider the ease or difficulty in watering the proposed area. Long, narrow areas and small, odd-shaped areas are difficult for any irrigation equipment to efficiently water. Try to eliminate long, narrow areas and maintain blockier, square areas. Carefully select grass according to its intended use, planting location and maintenance requirements.

Achieving a significant reduction in water consumption and landscape maintenance may also involve reducing the size of water-sensitive lawns through use of patios, decks, shrub beds and groundcovers.





5 ~ SOIL IMPROVEMENTS

TIP: To increase plant health and conserve water, add organic matter to the soil of shrub and flower bed areas.

For the most part, due to the fact that we live in a desert climate, fertilizers and soil supplements are not usually necessary, although good drainage is a must! Loosen the soil at planting time and use soil amendments for turf areas and plants that are water thirsty.

6 ~ MULCHES

TIP: Use mulch wherever possible. Good mulch conserves water, significantly reducing moisture evaporation from the soil. Mulch can also reduce weed populations, prevents soil compaction and keeps soil temperatures more moderate.

Mulch is a layer of nonliving material covering the soil surface around plants. Mulches reduce the amount of water needed on the landscape because it reduces evaporation and assists in keeping the soil cool. Mulches can be organic materials such as bark chips, wood grindings or compost. These are often used in planting beds and other small areas. The natural drop of leaves, flowers and fruit can also be left on the ground as mulch. An inorganic material such as river rock, decomposed granite or crushed rock is also considered a mulch.

7 ~ PROPER LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

TIP: Mowing grass at the proper height conserves water. Applying fertilizer to the lawn at the proper time and in the proper amount can save time, effort and money through reduced mowing and watering. Check with a local garden supply company for recommendations.

When properly designed and maintained, Xeriscape saves water, time and money through reduced plant water needs and lower maintenance requirements. All landscapes need some care and most plants need supplemental water in our desert environment. Proper pruning techniques can keep your yard beautiful and natural looking and save you trips to the landfill. A well-maintained irrigation system can keep plants healthy and water use low. Prudent use of fertilizers will help to avoid excessive plant growth which will reduce water use and the need for excessive pruning.





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